

Governor's State Trails Council

Spring Meeting, April 12, 2004

Briefing Paper

The Governor's State Trails Council was created by statute in 1989. The nine-member Council, appointed by the Governor to four-year terms, must be knowledgeable in various recreational uses of trails.

The Department of Natural Resources seeks the advice of and consults with the Council regarding the planning, acquisition, development, and management of state trails.

The Council represents trail users in Wisconsin, which includes over half of the state residents. The Council is also responsible for providing counsel in administering Federal Recreational Trail Program (RTP) funds. Last year more than \$1.1m in RTP monies were distributed to trails throughout the state.

- Accomplishments
 - Developed the tool used to award National Recreational Trails program (RTP) funding.
 - Played an integral role in the development of the Wisconsin Strategic Trails Plan as well as the State Trails Network Plan. These Plans provide a futuristic blueprint of how current trails and future trails will inter-connect to ensure a stable and reliable trail system for tourism and recreation. Clearly that is why people recreate in Wisconsin - for our lakes and parks and trails.
 - Supports federal legislation that will provide funding for the acquisition, development and enhancement of State Trails.
 - Statewide advocate for public/private cooperation in funding and management of trail systems. Wisconsin is a national leader in creating partnerships that provide for state ownership coupled with county management of trails.
 - Independent forum for finding solutions to trail problems for both motorized and non-motorized groups. This includes Master Planning, the Kettle Moraine Mountain Biking Plan, trail etiquette standards, and trails design standards.

Fact: With 1,433 miles, Wisconsin is number one in the nation in miles of railbanked trails. These railbanked trails are owned by various entities, demonstrating the indispensable partnership aspect of Wisconsin's trails. (Railbanking is the federal provision whereby rail corridors are allowed to be used as recreational trails with reversionary rights to rail use.)

Key issues facing the Governor's State Trails Council in 2004 fall into three main areas of preservation, funding, and policy:

- **Preservation:** Particularly important issue is *maintaining the integrity of a statewide trail system*. This issue centers on protecting the full length of a potential railroad corridor vs. having neighboring landowners exercising real or non-real reversionary rights. As land gets divided and developed throughout the state, the preservation of "green areas" such as trails is essential.
- **Funding:** The State Trail Pass fee has been raised for the first time in nearly ten years. But this funding source does not meet the financial needs of the Trail System. Proposals for stable, sufficient funding for trails are an issue that this Council must be addressed in the near future.
- **Policy:** There are many user groups throughout the state vying for use of our State Trails. Wisconsin needs to find a uniform approach to addressing the needs of all parties, without duplicating the mistakes made by some neighboring states, and without sacrificing the enjoyment of some user groups to meet the desires of another. We must provide recreational opportunities, but not to the detriment of users and in way that will not degrade Wisconsin's jewel: our natural resources.

